
News Release

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Virginia's first conference on polytrauma and combat stress in returning military personnel slated for October 17

RICHMOND—On October 17, Virginia's first conference addressing polytrauma and combat stress injuries in returning military service personnel will be hosted jointly by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and the Mid-Atlantic Addiction Technology Transfer Center at Virginia Commonwealth University. The conference will be held at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.

A preliminary report produced by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, shows that an estimated 700 severely wounded veterans from the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq are living in Virginia. "These are veterans with a VA disability rating of 70 percent or higher," explained Department of Veterans Services Commissioner Vince Burgess.

However, thousands of other military service personnel are returning to Virginia with a range of injuries, less catastrophic but debilitating nonetheless. These injuries range from combat stress to physical injuries such as traumatic brain injury, amputations, burns, severe disfigurement, and hearing and vision impairments. In most cases, injured personnel experience multiple wounds.

"These injuries affect not only the wounded warrior," notes Paula Horvatich, Director of the Mid-Atlantic Addiction Technology Transfer Center, "they also affect the injured person's family, his or her employer, and ultimately the community. So, as we are helping these veterans

heal and return to civilian lives, it's critical that we focus on the people around them, especially their family members.”

The Virginia is for Heroes Conference is designed to raise awareness about the effects of polytrauma and combat stress in military personnel across a wide spectrum of professionals. At the conference, these professionals will begin a developing a roadmap that will guide Virginia in making the resources available to ensure that injured veterans and their families successfully reintegrate into their communities.

The conference targets health service providers, educators, employers, members of the faith-based community, state and federal government representatives, the media, policy makers, veteran service organizations, non-profit organizations and veterans and their families. Similar conferences have been held in North Carolina and Rhode Island and were instrumental in helping those states develop long-term plans to meet the emerging needs of returning service personnel.

“The VA is overwhelmed and cannot meet all of the needs of these veterans and their families alone. Nor should they be the only government entity to do so,” said Burgess. “We must mobilize resources at all levels of government and within our communities in order to provide the services and care that these veterans have earned through their service and sacrifice.”

For more information about the conference, visit www.virginiaisforheroes.org.

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**About the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and
the Mid-Atlantic Addiction Technology Transfer Center**

The Department of Veterans Services operates 22 benefit services offices where representatives assist veterans and their family members in filing claims for federal veterans benefits. The agency operates two veterans cemeteries: the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia and the Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery in Suffolk. A third state veterans cemetery in Dublin is in the initial stages of development. DVS operates the Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in Roanoke. The VVCC is a 240-bed long-term care facility offering nursing and domiciliary care for veterans. The 160-bed Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center is under construction in Richmond and is slated to open in 2007. The agency also certifies that post-secondary educational institutions meet G.I. Bill funding and eligibility requirements, enabling veterans and family members to pursue educational opportunities.

The Mid-Atlantic Addiction Technology Transfer Center translates substance use research into counseling practice. As a Center of Excellence in Motivational Interviewing, Faith-Based, and Adolescent resources we remain the eyes and ears of the treatment and recovery counseling field.